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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [SMIG](#) [PTER](#) [BG](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: RISING BANGLADESHI MIGRATION IN INDIA AND THE
BLAME GAME

REF: A. 02 CALCUTTA 595

[B](#). NEW DELHI 5913

[C](#). NEW DELHI 5318

[D](#). CALCUTTA 246

Classified By: PolCouns Geoffrey Pyatt, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#). (C) As India grows increasingly concerned about Islamic extremism in Bangladesh, there is a rising paranoia about the number of Bangladeshi migrants, the nature of a more radicalized Islam that they bring to border areas, and changes in political demographics in the Northeast. This problem is aggravated by the realization that neither the Communist and Congress parties, which in many areas rely on a Muslim vote bank, nor Bangladesh, which India claims denies all migration, are ready to do anything to stem the problem. There is also a widespread perception in Calcutta and elsewhere in eastern India that Pakistan, now under greater pressure to control terrorism in Kashmir, has switched its focus to India's Northeast, where ISI is widely believed to be funding Islamic fundamentalism and aiding insurgent groups. Fears about migrants and the causes of radicalization are genuine, but somewhat exaggerated. India is partially blaming its neighbors for its own failures in the Northeast and along the border, and as a result, the GOI will continue to stress its security concerns even as it tries to improve ties with Bangladesh.

The Response: Nothing So Far

[2](#). (SBU) Security analysts in Eastern India have always been concerned about Bangladeshi migrants (Ref A), but two events have focused the spotlight on the problem and brought it to the attention of a wider section of Indian society. The Supreme Court repeal of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act in July (Ref B) and the August 17 bomb blasts in Bangladesh have raised fears that increasing numbers of migrants bring with them a radicalized Islam that is out of touch with India's primarily moderate religious practices. This fear is enunciated not just by skeptical security analysts, but also by moderate Bengali Muslims who see a more intolerant breed of Islam taking hold in border districts. The negative effects of the porous border are getting wider attention, but Calcutta-based contacts do not expect any tough measures either to deport migrants or prevent future migration. The BJP has tried to make the repeal of the IMDT Act a national political issue, but Congress and Communist ruling parties have exhibited no political will to crack down on migrants.

[3](#). (C) One exception is West Bengal, where the Congress party is against the migrants because they tend to vote for the CPI(M). CPI(M) Chief Minister Bhattacharjee is one of the few Communist politicians who believes the migrants are such a threat that he has publicly made statements against migration. Statements aside, former Deputy Chief of RAW B.B. Nandi says there is "no change in the behavior of the political parties," who use the migrants. With little hope of Indian action, journalists and the GOI continue to blame Dhaka for its poor border management, which allows Northeast insurgents to sneak out of India and Bangladeshi migrants to come in.

The Responsibility: India or Bangladesh?

[4](#). (C) When the GOI blames Bangladesh for abetting migration and stirring up trouble in the Northeast, some analysts in Calcutta call on India first to reflect internally on its role in the problem. Rajat Roy, a journalist for the Bangali Anand Bazaar Patrika observed that India's Northeastern security problems, such as migrants, insurgents, camps and madrassas, are only symptoms of the disease. He thinks India should look harder at the lack of development in the Northeast, disgruntlement with the GOI, hawkish policies which hurt Bangladesh and the BSF's failure along the border. Most of the Northeast insurgency groups are fighting for "independence," and are tapping into a sentiment in a region that has been excluded by India's process of nation-building and modernization (Ref D). Even when the GOI does send development funds into the Northeast, Roy alleged, corruption is so rampant that the funds are leaked to the insurgent groups. Delhi has entered into peace talks with only a few of the proliferating separatist groups, and those have not

led to any dramatic changes. If insurgent groups are growing and their members are sneaking across the porous border into Bangladesh, Roy argued, Delhi should examine its own political failures instead of blaming the GOB.

15. (C) Chandan Nandi, a former "Hindustan Times" journalist who is writing a thesis on this topic at Brandeis University, explained how anti-migration politicians have played up the fear of Muslim infiltrators before elections. Congress passed the IMDT Act to protect migrants after the 1983 Assam assembly elections massacre, when a "drive out the foreigners movement" killed a few thousand Bangaldeshi migrants. As Chandan pointed out, migrants did not feel the need to purchase illegal voting rights until after 1983 massacre. As more migrants gained the right to vote, they quickly became a protected vote bank for Congress and Communist parties. This violent history and the continued efforts to exaggerate the threat of immigration makes the migrants more susceptible to radicalism.

16. (C) B.B. Nandi, the former Deputy Chief of RAW, argued that if the MEA is really concerned with migrants, they should be focusing on solutions to the problem that avoid accusations against the GOB. He suggested, for instance, encouraging Indian investment in the border areas to increase employment within Bangladesh. Concerned third party donors could require that a certain percentage of their aid go to border areas. A work permit system would allow legal economic migration while reducing the illegal acquisition of voting rights and lowering tension along the border.

17. (C) The BSF, which has more resources than its Bangaldeshi counterpart, also gets some of the blame for not stopping migration. According to Anil Kamboj, an Additional DIG from BSF now at a Delhi-based think tank, the ratio of BSF to BDR guards is almost two to one. Additional Deputy General of the BSF in Eastern India Damodar Sarangi told Poloff that the BSF had sufficient guards to protect the border and believed the fencing, now almost half finished, should block future migration. But corrupt guards block GOI efforts along the border. Journalist Chandan Nandi described the system of "dalals," or middlemen, which sprouted up along the border as migration became more difficult. Fencing has only increased the economic costs of migrating in unfenced areas, so that instead of paying off a BSF guard one hundred rupees to look the other way, migrants now have to pay a middleman five hundred rupees to make the arrangements for safe transport across the border. RAW retiree B.B. Nandi commented that any post office manager in Calcutta knows that BSF guards send home approximately five times their salary to their families around India.

The Demographics: Muslims Increasing Political Force in NE

18. (C) The accusations that the Congress and Communist parties cater to Muslim migrants as a vote bank by giving them illegal voting rights have raised concerns in political circles about the effect of the "demographic invasion." Ajai Sahni, Executive Director of the Institute for Conflict Management, estimates the illegal influx at about 300,000 persons per year. This translates to just over 800 people daily coming across India's porous 4,095 kilometer border with Bangladesh. Even if these numbers are exaggerated, West Bengal BJP President Tathagata Roy pointed out that Muslims are now a majority in eight out of twenty-three districts in Assam and three out of twenty districts in West Bengal. As more Muslims move in, Hindus gradually leave the area, increasing the migrants' election power. In Calcutta, both former Deputy Chief of RAW B.B. Nandi and Inspector General of the Intelligence Branch of the West Bengal Police Dilip Mitra told Poloff that the number of migrants in the Indian area around the border is so high that it has effectively moved the border of Bangladesh ten to fifteen kilometers into India.

The Religion: Signs of Extremism

19. (C) Although the majority of migrants are only looking for economic opportunities across the border, Mission contacts fear that migrants are bringing a more radicalized form of Islam with them to India. Subir Bhaumik, a BBC Correspondent for Eastern India who specializes in Bangladesh and border issues, believes that the fear of the number of migrants is exaggerated, but agrees that the migrants may be more prone to religious radicalism. Dr. S.B. Roychowdhury, a professor at Calcutta's Rabindra Bharati University, has seen a rise in the number of mosques built in the West Bengal border areas with outside funding and Wahabi influence. Roop Sen, who manages anti-trafficking programs along the border, observed that there are surprisingly well-funded mosques and madrassas even in very poor migrant slums. Nandi noted that mullahs in this same area have put out fatwahs, or religious opinions, against the Sufi "Baum" community to ostracize them economically and socially. The West Bengal government,

although aware of this penal offense, has not taken action out of fear of losing popularity before elections next spring.

110. (SBU) In another example, authorities in Calcutta found leaflets in the name of "Mujahdeen Al Quaida Pacific International" directly after the August 17 bomb blasts in Bangladesh. The Deputy Commissioner for the Special Branch reported that two people were arrested for distributing leaflets and collecting money in the name of Bin Laden. He added that there was no connection with Al Qaeda terrorists and the leaflets were a fundraising scam, but worried that the ability to raise funds suggests that there is support in Calcutta for the fundamentalist cause. According to the Deputy Commissioner, there are 400 registered madrassas and 5000 unregistered madrassas in West Bengal.

The Culprit: Predictably, ISI

111. (C) Bangladesh watchers in Delhi and Calcutta blame Pakistan's ISI for radicalizing the population. In a recent report, Institute for Conflict Management Executive Director Ajai Sahni accuses the ISI of moving operations from Kashmir to the Northeast by funding madrassas and training camps and creating linkages between Northeast insurgent groups and Muslim fundamentalists. The ISI is funding madrassas along the border, former Deputy Chief of RAW Nandi commented, to be a "thorn in India's other side." The BBC's Subir Bhaumik, who has traveled extensively throughout the area, speculated that "ISI keeps the pot boiling in the NE" to keep the Indian military preoccupied outside of Kashmir. Lieutenant-General of Military Intelligence Deepak Summanwar told a recent academic visitor to India of his concerns regarding ISI's "free movement" in Bangladesh. India hinted at these connections on August 29 when it gave Pakistan a list of wanted people which included ULFA Commander-in-Chief Paresh Barua, whom the GOI believes is living in Dhaka with Pakistani assistance.

Comment: Migrant Paranoia Blocks Bilateral Progress

112. (C) Opposition to migrants has always resonated in the Northeast, but as with the US-Mexico border, a porous frontier is made more so by economic and political pull factors. Now, imported radicalism and shifting demographics are putting new strains on the Indo-Bangaldeshi relationship. The GOI focus on security issues underlines that India and Bangladesh do not share the same negotiating priorities. When Dhaka brings up trade and water, Delhi wants to talk about its border security concerns and Indian insurgents in Bangladesh. The MEA tells us they are looking for creative ways to make progress with Dhaka through economic concessions, but lack of political will and security concerns have held up progress thus far in other areas. Upcoming elections in Assam and West Bengal may aggravate both situations because the UPA is not likely to toughen up on migrants and the BJP will play up the anti-immigration card. As a result, the GOI will continue to blame Bangladesh for its security concerns rather than offering bold initiatives to ease the bilateral gridlock. Meanwhile, some 800 illegals cross into India daily.

113. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
BLAKE